

**NINA MOINI:** We're turning to a global story, with connections here in Minnesota. A severe drought in Somalia has displaced an estimated 200,000 people this year, and it's put millions at risk of hunger, according to the UN. The UN's World Food Program director for Somalia told the Associated Press last month this is the country's worst drought year on record. Minnesota has the largest Somali population in the US, and several groups that provide aid to East Africa are based here. That includes American Relief Agency for the Horn of Africa, or ARAHA. Deputy Director Asiya Mohamed is on the line. Thank you very much for your time this afternoon, Asiya.

**ASIYA** Of course. Thank you so much for having us.

**MOHAMED:**

**NINA MOINI:** If you would like to start just by telling me what you are hearing from people about what life is like right now in parts of Somalia most impacted by this drought. We've heard about drought for years, but what are you hearing about what is going on in this moment?

**ASIYA** Yes. So definitely, so just to give context, our organization actually has offices in across East Africa. And Somalia  
**MOHAMED:** is one of the locations that we have an office in. So because we're an implementing agent, meaning we don't go through a third party and we implement directly on the ground, we're able to hear directly from our field offices, but also the beneficiaries that we serve. And it is really devastating because when you hear the stories from the ground, you don't see them as numbers.

And these are real families going through hardship, and in a large part due to something that is out of their control. So what many people might not know is that although drought is something that we've seen in East Africa, or is just a constant, because of global warming, one nonrainy season turns into five consecutive nonrainy seasons. And so there's no time to recoup. And so when you're talking about livestock, we're talking about people having to leave their homes and vulnerable communities who are already in situations where they don't have access to clean running water, having to go further out just to get water.

And a lot of times the water they bring back isn't even drinkable. Or in most cases, they drink it, but it causes other issues, like disease and stuff like that. So it is really sad. But a lot of times we're so stuck in the statistics of it that we forget the human story behind it, so.

**NINA MOINI:** Absolutely, that's such an important point. And sometimes you'll hear about ongoing issues somewhere, year after year. And then there are people like yourself who are on the front lines of making sure that people do remember that these are real people and these real things are happening to individuals. Could you tell me more about how that person-to-person contact, having your field offices where they are, what types of relief are you providing on the ground? How is it beneficial? Because we hear a lot of times that sending money is what a lot of people are able to do. And it sounds like you're able to combine that with actually being on the ground.

**ASIYA** Yes, definitely. So first and foremost, we have a beneficiary-first lens. So we center them because it is their  
**MOHAMED:** community and they are most invested. So we start with how we storytell. So we have a shift in narrative because as you said, this is seen as a repetitive problem, when in reality, there's enough fresh ground water in all of Africa, actually, to last five years of drought. But what is missing is the funding needed to create infrastructure that can for them to access that freshwater.

So we're doing things like, for example-- so we dig wells. But in recent years, because again, because of global warming, we had to stop one of our most popular programs, which donors absolutely loved, which was shallow water wells. So what that is, is just it's hand dug. But because they're shallow, they don't last as long, and the water dries up. So we had to switch from shallowwater wells to boreholes.

And so a borehole is more narrow. And it is required to have a rig machine to dig at least 100 to 300 feet, and sometimes deeper, depending on the geology. But then this type of borehole lasts at least-- now we're talking about 50, 60, even 100 years if properly maintained.

**NINA MOINI:** Oh.

**ASIYA**  
**MOHAMED:** So we've been-- yes. So it's really cool. But it's a lot more expensive, obviously, because we need to get a rig machine. And it's not like with a shovel or anything like that. And that requires the rental process. Because as of right now, in most of our country offices, we don't own a rig machine.

But now that's also another thing that we're trying to fundraise for. Because if we do acquire our own rig machine, it's kind of like, think of it as Ubering every day to work or having your own car. Obviously, there's still cost, but that allows us to dig these boreholes that completely change communities.

And we're talking about 7,000 to 10,000 people impacted by one borehole. And in that case, communities or global, whatever the weather is, whether you it rains or not, the community is still stable, right? Because there's that deepwater well that's there for them.

**NINA MOINI:** That's fascinating to hear about the infrastructure that you're literally starting to help to build, to make sure what resources there are go where they're most needed. And you're dealing with global warming, environmental factors, but you're also dealing with challenges and some cuts to aid from the US government that was provided to countries around the world and has since dropped. So I'm curious in that atmosphere, as well as just the Somali Minnesotans here who have experienced the past six months in the state of Minnesota-- we hear from a lot of members of the Somali community, in particular, that they felt very targeted and experienced, financial hardship, economic strain, among other things. What is it like to balance that, can I ask, the challenges here at home with the challenges, loved ones still experience abroad?

**ASIYA**  
**MOHAMED:** So yes, I think that is an important question. In terms of for ARAHA specifically, I guess luckily for us, actually majority, if not all of our funding is individual donors. So ARAHA has been able to stand where-- but we have a lot of partners who have taken a hit, unfortunately. And I think that's the power of narrative, right?

So a lot of times that's why it's important to get the whole story. I think news sensationalizes news or different things, and it's not telling the full story. And unfortunately, an entire community is affected because of actions of a few individuals. Wherein other communities, that's not the case.

So it's really unfair. And we are seeing the ripple effect in terms of not necessarily, maybe for us as an organization, because we are majority individually funded, but our partner organizations and those who do rely on these funds, but also international organizations that are also impacted. It's really unfortunate. And that's kind of why in this type of time, we have to put our head down and continue and call on maybe even just individuals collectively who know that what's happening is not right and to step up and say, you know what, we can do it.

So another thing that we try to really do at ARAHA, the past couple of years, is that shift in, again, dignity-based fundraising. So this is even when we're talking about the communities that are impacted, the stories we tell about those communities, we talk about their resilience. We talk about their potential. We talk about how some failures in the community and stuff is not to their fault. Like some communities, it's a structural thing. It's a systemic thing. And that we see so much beauty, so much hope and that these problems are solvable.

So for example, water, water access in 2026 should not be something that we see as, for the lack of a better word, it's like rocket science. The water's there. The infrastructure's there. The science is there. We see that. But it's just about taking action collectively and saying that we can do it as a community, so yeah.

**NINA MOINI:** Asiya, thank you. I really appreciate your time and your perspective.

**ASIYA** Thank you.

**MOHAMED:**

**NINA MOINI:** Asiya Mohamed is Deputy Director of the American Relief agency for the Horn of Africa, based in Columbia Heights.